



# Superfund At Work

## Hazardous Waste Cleanup Efforts Nationwide

### Pesses Company S'West Site Profile

**Site Description:**  
Former metals reclamation facility

**Site Size:** 4.2 acres

**Primary Contaminants:**  
Heavy metals including cadmium,  
copper, lead, and nickel

**Potential Range of Health Effects:**  
Increased risk of cancer, respiratory  
and central nervous system  
disorders

**Nearby Population Affected:**  
19,500 people within one-mile

**Year Listed on NPL:** 1986

**State:** Texas

**EPA Region:** 6

**Congressional District:** 12

### *Success in Brief*

## Former Metals Reclamation Facility To Be “Delisted”

For 15 years, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has managed a program for comprehensive cleanup of abandoned or uncontrolled hazardous waste sites. Hundreds of old landfills, pesticide manufacturing plants, incineration facilities, and metal plating shops are included on the National Priorities List (NPL). After years of effort to reverse the environmental degradation, and if the work has been done to the community's satisfaction, the site will be “delisted.”

The Pesses Company S'West site in Fort Worth, Texas is a good example of the process coming full circle. Operators at this former metals reclamation facility abandoned corroded, leaking barrels and piles of spent batteries. EPA undertook emergency actions to remove immediate threats and stabilized the site.

Then using funds provided by EPA under a state cooperative agreement, the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission (TNRCC) installed a permanent protective cap to seal contaminated soil and debris. Fort Worth officials anticipate that a major portion of the site can be returned to commercial use in a manner consistent with environmental and community concerns.

EPA expects to recover \$2.6 million in federal and state cleanup costs from waste contributors. This summer, EPA plans to remove the

Pesses S'West site from the NPL, bringing the process to closure and marking another victory for the environment.

### The Site Today

Cleanup crews finished work in 1992. A protective concrete cap covers all of the former property. A company that specializes in computer salvage now leases the former warehouse and office building. State environmental protection specialists maintain a 30-year monitoring program for the site.

The Pesses S'West metals reclamation facility when abandoned in 1981.

## A Site Snapshot

The 4.2-acre site is located in a mixed industrial and residential area of Fort Worth, Texas. Over time, municipal development crept within a mile of the property line and included houses, a hospital, and five schools supporting approximately 19,500 people. A drug rehabilitation center with outdoor facilities adjoins the site; an office building and warehouse occupy the northern part of the site where some reclamation operations once took place.

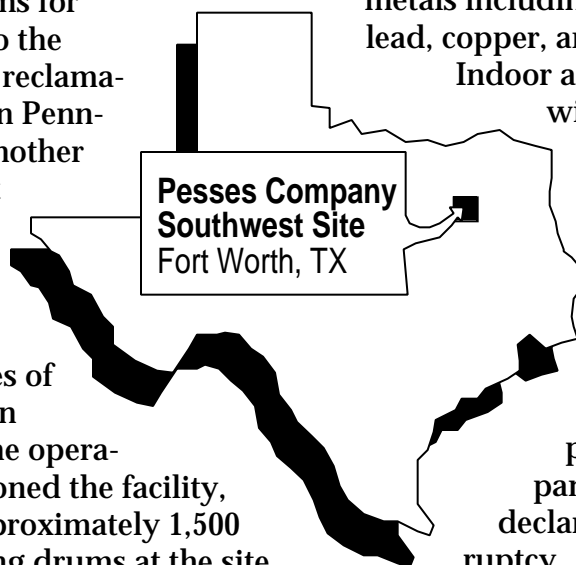
From about July 1979 to January 1981, Pesses operators recovered nickel and cadmium from dry cell batteries and metal sludge brought by area manufacturers. Furnaces

separated cadmium from waste mixtures, forming solid balls for re-use in plating. Evidence suggests that workers collected the reclaimed scrap in 55-gallon drums for shipment to the company's reclamation plant in Pennsylvania, another facility that would become a Superfund site. Faced with a series of air pollution citations, the operators abandoned the facility, leaving approximately 1,500 deteriorating drums at the site. A grass fire in 1983 alerted city

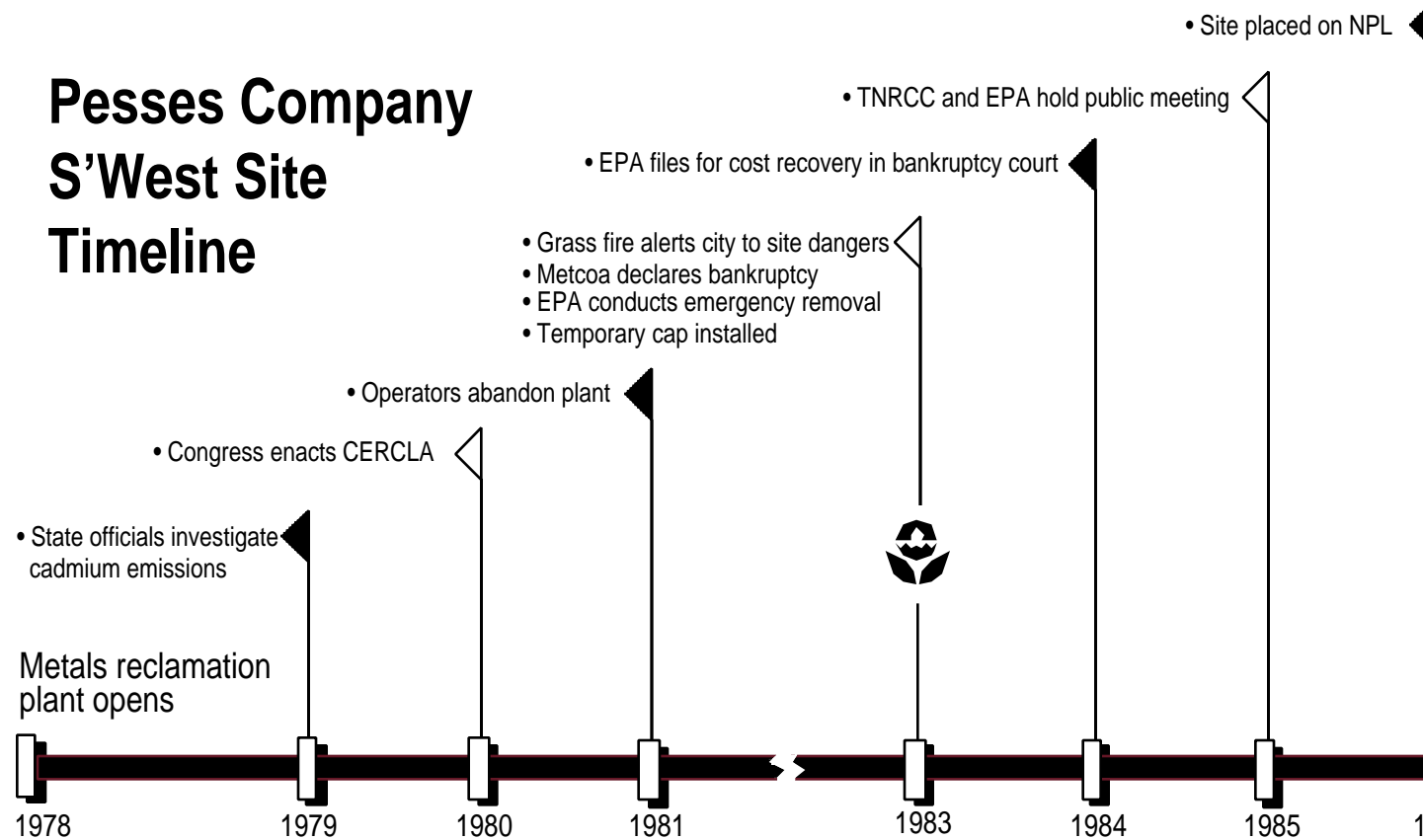
officials to contaminants spilled on the ground.

Inspectors found soil, buildings, equipment, and debris contaminated with heavy metals including cadmium, lead, copper, and nickel.

Indoor air was thick with dust and two on-site sumps held 2,000 gallons of contaminated water. Metcoa, the parent company, later declared bankruptcy.



## Pesses Company S'West Site Timeline



# The Classic Superfund Site: Abandoned Metal

In the early days of regulating hazardous waste, few options were available for proper treatment, storage, or disposal. "Recycling" some reusable metals from spent batteries and waste sludge, and turning those salvaged materials into new products, seemed to make good economic sense.

But when Pesses S'West opened in 1978, the company did not obtain required state air permits for the metals reclamation facility. A year later, nearby residents complained about dust and poor air quality, prompting city and state air pollution control officers to investigate the plant. Excessive cadmium emissions forced the facility to cease operations for part of 1979. The company

made some attempts to bring plant emissions under control and then applied for the state permits.

## Three Years Was Long Enough

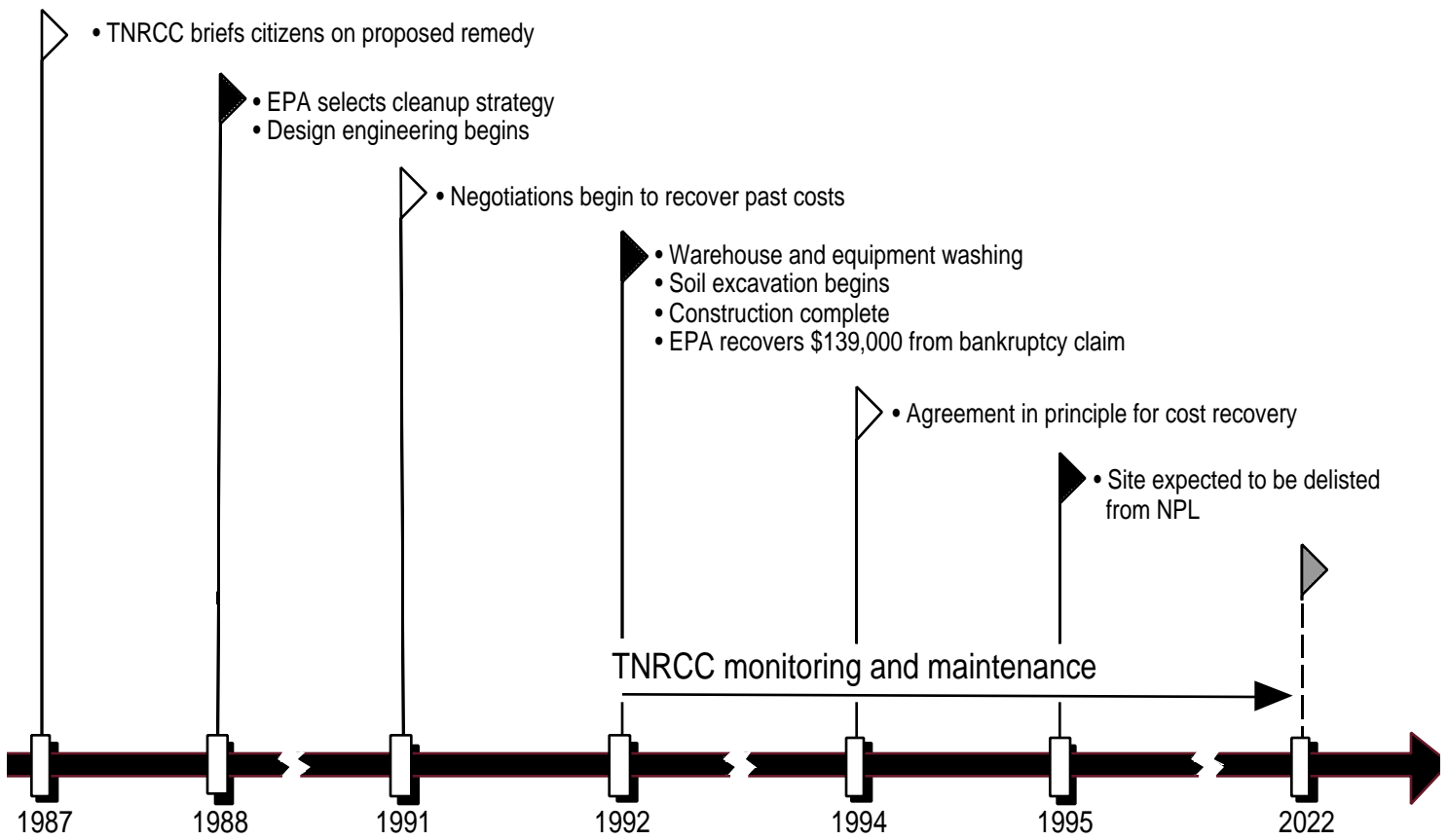
When operations resumed, the facility soon began exceeding emission ceilings again. In February 1980, the Texas Air Control Board sampled pollutants at 29 times the safety standard. When faced with emissions citations, operators abandoned approximately 1,500 drums that were leaking chemicals. In three short years, the company managed to spread heavy metal contaminants to the air and soil.

The closure came on the heels of new legislation enacted by Congress to address uncon-

trolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites. The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 empowered EPA to clean up the myriad problems associated with improper handling and disposal of chemical and manufacturing wastes. Dubbed the "Superfund," a new taxing authority on chemical feedstocks and crude oil would pay for cleanup when responsible parties could not be found. In this case, the owners sought protection from the courts when the parent company, Metcoa, filed for bankruptcy in 1983.

## Fire Signals Emergency Situation

In 1983, a Fort Worth firefighter was overcome by



# Operation Gone Bust

**Cadmium and nickel** contaminated the building, rusting equipment, and debris.

cadmium fumes while fighting a grass fire at the Pesses site. City officials notified EPA's Dallas office and a Superfund team decided to take a closer look.

EPA immediately ordered the company to remove exposed and deteriorating drums. After agreeing to do so, the company failed to perform and abandoned the job completely. They left behind corroded and leaking barrels, spent batteries in makeshift piles, pools of green sludge, and areas of soil saturated with heavy metal residue.

Heavy metals do not biodegrade and therefore are highly persistent in the environment. Even small concentrations disturb soil microbial activity

and may adversely affect plant and animal metabolism. Worker exposure was especially dangerous because cadmium and nickel are carcinogenic when inhaled and exposure to lead has been linked to neurological disorders. Some workers may have experienced skin irritations and impaired breathing, but their complaints were not reported to local health officials.

## A firefighter was overcome by cadmium fumes

EPA's emergency response team quickly removed 3,400 cubic yards of topsoil, drums, and debris from the site. To prevent the potential for migra-

tion of contaminants off site, EPA covered the southern part of the site with a clay and soil cap and seeded for grass at a cost of about \$350,000.

## Site Added to the NPL

While EPA's emergency removal addressed immediate threats, further action at the site was needed to ensure long-term abatement of environmental hazards. In June 1986, EPA placed Pesses S'West on the National Priorities List (NPL), a roster of sites requiring comprehensive cleanup.

## Bankruptcy Court Allows Temporary Lease

Having taken possession of company assets, the court

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Trustee attempted to raise funds for a long list of creditors by leasing two sections of the property. One tenant caused damage to the protective cover after allowing heavy machinery to drive over the newly installed clay cap. The cap was repaired and an 8-foot-high fence installed around the perimeter to prevent unrestricted access to the site.

#### **State Educates and Informs Residents**

The following spring, TNRCC officials called a public meeting to explain the Superfund process to area citizens. Two years of field

studies were needed to investigate the nature and extent of contamination at the site. Community involvement coordinators distributed fact sheets explaining the findings. In December 1987, another public meeting discussed proposed ways to clean up the site. Public comments enhanced the decision EPA made in November, 1988 on the selected remedy.

#### **Soil Stabilized, Capped, and Sealed**

Following 18 months of design engineering, the Arens Corporation, a local Hispanic-owned and operated firm, began work decontaminating a

metal warehouse and equipment by means of high-pressure washing. Crews decontaminated the remaining drums and debris and excavated more than 12,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil for treatment in the southern portion of the site.

A stabilizing, cement kiln dust was added to that soil and the solidified mixture was covered with a high-density, polyethylene liner and a steel-reinforced, concrete cap.

TNRCC will now perform 30 years of monitoring and maintenance. The state will inspect the concrete cap and fence, make repairs as needed, and determine whether other actions are required.

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**The high-density, polyethylene liner** was covered with a steel-reinforced, concrete cap.

## Success at Pesses S'West

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### EPA Expects to Recover Costs

In 1984, EPA filed a claim in bankruptcy court against the Pesses Company and the parent company, Metcoa, of Solon, Ohio. An award of \$139,000 covered some past costs at this site and the Pesses reclamation plant in Pennsylvania. Currently, EPA and the state have obtained an agreement in principle with alleged waste contributors to recover virtually all of the costs associated with the cleanup totalling \$2.6 million, including future operation and maintenance costs.

Assisted by the work of a local, minority contractor, the Pesses S'West site was cleaned up quickly and efficiently. Portions of the site have redevelopment potential and Fort Worth officials are addressing how to allow limited commercial ventures at the same location, hoping to enhance community priorities.

On April 17, 1995 EPA published a "Notice of Intent

to Delete" the site from the National Priorities List. A 30-day public comment period has ended. Delisting signifies a major accomplishment for both state and federal officials.

Thirty years of monitoring under the careful eye of TNRCC will ensure that the protective cap remains intact under all weather and exposure conditions.



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